

and don't forget about me, please

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by [lightning_anon](#)

Summary

Tubbo's never gotten the chance to shine, never been the center of attention. He's always been the average one in life, the one who you look over and pass by. He's never had things good, but he's also never had things bad.

That is, until his parents drop a bombshell on him and he's suddenly reeling with the fact that the family he has always known has been hiding secrets from him for twenty years.

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Or: the obligatory sbi foster au finale, but with a focus on how families are defined and the failings of family systems.

Notes

CW: intrusive thoughts, general shittiness of the foster system, lying, gaslighting, tics, trauma responses, internalized ableism, anxiety attack, addiction, past overdose, child abuse and neglect, the US military

See the end of the work for more [notes](#)

Tubbo's used to be forgotten, to being second and off to the side. At the corner of the limelight, close enough to feel it but not enough to burn.

Part of him hates it. The other part loves it.

A third part of him wants to be remembered.

A fourth part of him really wants his parents to shut the fuck up.

"What do you mean I'm adopted?" he mumbles.

They continue talking though Tubbo doesn't get much from their words. Whether that be the shock or his shit hearing, well who knows. Probably both.

The issue isn't that he's apparently adopted. The issue is that they never told him, that he's only finding this out now that he's 20.

How could they not tell him?

How could they see that Tubbo's two best friends had been through hell and back in the system, how could they see that adopting and fostering wasn't a foreign subject to them. How could they have seen all of that and never told him.

Why is he only finding out now?

And then-

"Does Eret know?" Tubbo asks, "That we're adopted?"

His parents share twin glances, and looking at them feels like looking at strangers. He used to think he was related to these people. How did he ever think he was related to them?

"Honey," his mother says, "Eret-"

Holy shit Eret doesn't know either, do they? His parents hadn't told her. How could they have not told her?

"You haven't told him either," Tubbo breathes, "how could- how could you have not told either of us?"

"Tubbo," his mother cuts him off, "Eret isn't adopted."

Oh.

Oh.

Just Tubbo then. Great.

"Right," Tubbo says, "cool. Sounds great. For sure, got it."

Tubbo- in fact- does not 'got it.' In fact, his entire world, his entire reality is falling down around him.

A fierce feeling of betrayal runs through him.

"I can't believe you didn't tell me until now," he says. "I mean like- it hurts enough that you didn't tell me but it hurts- it hurts way more that it took me confronting you."

Tubbo's parents' faces fall, and he knows that they're about to provide him with some sort of false comfort, or some sort of explanation that could never adequately make up for this.

This is how it ends.

But it begins with a man named Schlatt.

Tubbo doesn't know it begins with a man named Schatt, doesn't even know Schlatt exists.

But Schlatt knows Tubbo exists.

And after years of searching, he finally found his younger brother.

At least, that's what the email Tubbo has received says anyways.

Or, not exactly, Tubbo's paraphrasing. He's read it about twenty or thirty times now, half for clarification and comprehension, half out of sheer disbelief.

The email says a few things. The key things being that Tubbo has a biological brother named Schlatt, that Schlatt has been trying to find his whereabouts for a long time now, and that he would love to get to know Tubbo again, if that's something Tubbo has interest in.

He stressed that last part, clarifying again and again that this was Tubbo's choice.

Well Tubbo's first choice was to confront his parents, and that's when they had dropped the bombshell that he was adopted.

Part of Tubbo is horrified that he never knew. Because come on, really? He's an adult! This has to be on files somewhere, how could he not know?

He knows exactly how he could not know. The answer is that his parents still help him with all legal matters from his uni bills to his medical expenses and insurance. They still hold onto his birth certificate and his Social Security card because Tubbo had never thought to get that from them. After all he's a young adult who's housing and schooling is constantly changing and he's still learning how to be responsible and isn't that what parents are for?

Parents are supposed to be there for their children.

They're supposed to keep that sort of information, and one day Tubbo can take care of it himself, but he trusted his parents to have his back, to take care of those things for the time being.

His heart slowly crushes, and the idealism he had of his parents melts in its place.

Tubbo comes to a set of realizations. The first, he voices.

“You took me from my mother,” he realizes, “You- you took me from my mother.”

Because that was another part of the email, something Schlatt had commented on. Tubbo’s mom is alive. She is alive, and well and, and Tubbo has a mom.

Tubbo has two moms now.

Or, or does he? Does he even consider his bio mom his mom? Does he consider his adoptive mom his mom? Are they both his mom? Neither?

How does Tubbo make that choice?

It’s an impossible choice, a decision with two main answers.

Either way, Tubbo wishes he had been presented with that choice much earlier than he had.

“We did not take you from your mother,” Tubbo’s mom says, flustered and with a red face. Her tone is harsh, bordering on snapping and it reminds Tubbo of when his parents were called in to have a meeting with his second grade teacher when Tubo set the class guinea pig loose in the classroom.

“But she’s alive,” Tubbo stresses, “She’s there and-”

“Tubbo,” his father says softly, “Your mother couldn’t care for you. That’s why we adopted you.”

Tubbo might have left it there, accepting that. But Tubbo is friends with the Watson’s and over the years he’s learned quite a bit about foster care, adoption, and parental rights.

“Why was there full termination of parental rights?” Tubbo asks.

His mother blinks, shares a glance at his father.

“I know how this works,” Tubbo stresses, “my two best friends were in the system. The Watson’s all have had system involvement. For me to have been adopted- for me to have been placed with you my mother had to have been forced to terminate all parental rights. So why- why did she do it.”

His parents look at each other again and something inside of Tubbo sinks. The silence around them is loud, and Tubbo can almost hear his own breath. And well, for the deaf guy to hear his own breath, y’know that something’s going on.

“She- We-” his mom begins.

“You had been with us for two years by that point,” his father cuts in, “Two years of fostering and-”

“Your mom didn’t want to give up rights, but she knew it would be better for you to stop living in such unstable conditions so we suggested-” his mom takes over.

“It was proposed that she do what was best for you and terminate legal rights, so that we could adopt you. So that you could have a better life,” his father finishes their convoluted interrupting.

Tubbo wonders if the AC is on, because he’s pretty sure he’s frozen where he’s stood. Either that or his hearing aids have stopped working.

"Did she want to keep me?" he asks.

His parents' silence says enough.

"Okay," he says, "okay she wanted to keep me. Did you- did you help her? Did you offer support, did you help keep us in touch? Did you do anything?"

Tubbo's pretty sure he knows the answer to that question considering where he stands now, but he has to ask.

"Right," Tubbo says.

"Tubbo, honey," his mom inputs, "she- we couldn't help her. She wasn't what was best for you."

"My own loving, caring mother wasn't what was best for me?" Tubbo asks, "and two strangers were?"

"She loved you but she neglected you," his father argues, "you couldn't stay."

"What type of neglect?" Tubbo asks, "what was the cause? Drug use? Addiction? Single parent without support? Caring for too many people? Financial issues?"

His parents wince at the last one and Tubbo crumbles.

"She couldn't afford me," Tubbo realizes, "she couldn't afford me, and you wanted another kid, so you took me from her."

"Tubbo," his father snaps, "stop saying that! You make it sound like we kidnapped you!"

"Didn't you?" Tubbo whispers.

He's out the door before he realizes what he's doing.

With stinging eyes and a slammed door behind him, Tubbo finds himself pulling out his phone and drafting an email.

'Hi Schlatt,' it starts, 'tell me more?'

It continues with a few questions and a quick introduction to himself and an explanation that he didn't know about any of this- that he was adopted or had a family.

He hits send with a sign off on his name and hopes for the best.

He's not sure what the best is. Maybe for this whole mess to be over.

Either way, he's sorta in a shit mood now.

Ranboo and Tommy are quick to notice this. So is Allium, who gazes at him with way too much knowledge for a dog.

Ranboo does say anything, but Tubbo notices how they watch him, ever so early. Tommy is not as shy.

"What's got you pissed off?" he asks.

Tubbo grumbles, lips pulling into a tight line.

"Fuck off Tommy," he insists.

Tommy does nothing of the sort, instead inching closer and getting in Tubbo's face.

"I said fuck off," Tubbo growls, shoving him back a foot.

"Hey," Tommy protests, "jeez, I'm just worried about- cock and balls, thinking 'bout cock and balls- you man, you look like you just found out a family member died or some shit."

"Tommy," Ranboo hisses, but by that point it's much too late.

Because, no, Tubbo did not find out that a family member passed away. In fact, he learned that he had two family members he didn't know he had, and had three family members that weren't biologically related to him.

He says pretty much exactly that to Tommy.

"Actually," Tubbo hisses, "I just found out my parents stole me from my biological mom, so sorry if I'm a bit on edge right now, but it's been a bit of a weird day."

"Tubbo," Ranboo offers, as some sort of peace offering.

"What?" Tommy laughs, and he's surprised but he still has that face of disbelief mixed with confidence that Tubbo usually likes but hates in these exact moments.

"I just found out," Tubbo repeats, teeth grit, "That I was fucking adopted as a little kid. Even though my mom is still alive and shit. And my parents never told me. So, Tommy, I am giving you one chance to fuck off."

"Jesus dude," Tommy says, "I get that you're upset but you don't have to bite my head off. At least you got- at least you got- at least you got dick- at least you got adopted as a baby."

Did Tommy not just listen to a work Tubbo said? Is he fucking kidding right now?

“Fuck you Tommy,” Tubbo says, and then he hits were it hurts because Tommy’s already come for him. “Well it’s no wonder why you weren’t adopted as a baby.”

Allium stands, looking at them both warily as she noses at Ranboo's hand.

“Guys,” Ranboo desperately says, but he’s not the one that needs to be making amends.

“Asshole,” Tommy shoots right back, and then he storms off. Tubbo snorts, thinking that's the end of this bullshit, only for Tommy to come back out of his room almost immediately with a backpack slung over his shoulder.

He doesn’t face Tubbo, walking straight to the door and flipping him off before he leaves their home and slamming the door behind them.

The bang echoes in Tubbo’s ears and the ground rumbles beneath him. He watches Ranboo flinch from beside him. Allium tasks, gently jumping to place her paws on his legs, regaining his focus.

All Tubbo can do is heave out angry breaths, not even sure where they’re coming from.

His face is hot and his hands are clammy and his teeth are tense and he doesn’t know why he’s suddenly feeling all of this shit and where it’s even coming from.

“Tubbo?” Ranboo tries.

“What?!” Tubbo snaps back, whipping to face his other roommate.

Ranboo’s eyes are wide and with how they have their knees pulled up to their chest on the couch, they appear so much smaller than Tubbo, which is a pretty hard thing to do. Allium forgoes the ground, hopping up onto the couch to weasel her way in between Ranboo’s chest and legs and disrupting Ranboo’s nails from scratching at their thighs.

“Sorry,” he immediately says, looking down and away. His shoulders push forward, making him even smaller and Tubbo can see the glossiness of his eyes even if Ranboo doesn’t meet his gaze. Allium gently licks his cheek, and he gives her a soft pet.

Instantly, the heat in Tubbo disappears.

“I-” he says, and Ranboo flinches again.

Tubbo’s stomach turns and he clenches his eyes shut tightly as a wave of shame rolls through him.

Fuck, what is he doing? Why is he yelling at his friends? Tommy kinda deserved it- but not to that extent and Ranboo... Ranboo hadn’t done anything wrong.

“I’m sorry,” Tubbo manages around the shame, “I’m not mad at you.”

Ranboo peeks up at him, and their eyes are...

Fuck.

God fucking dammit.

Did Tubbo just yell at Ranboo when they were regressed?

“Hey,” Tubbo says gently, dropping to his knees. It’s weird being the one dropping to someone else’s level, but with Ranboo all curled up on the couch it feels necessary.

“Hey,” Tubbo says, “Can you tell me if you’re little?”

Ranboo’s eyes, which have just started to relax, widen again. They meet Tubbo’s gaze, holding eye contact intensely and for far too long.

Tubbo wonders if he should say more, encourage them that he isn’t mad and he was wrong to yell. Should he remind them that it’s fine for them to regress? That it was okay if they were small? Or would that make everything worse?

But then, Ranboo slowly unravels a little. It allows Allium to lean back a little, switching from interrupting behavior to providing Ranboo with Deep Pressure Therapy over his lap.

They offer a shrug, and then pull a hand away from their body to waive their hand in a ‘so-so’ gesture.

Tubbo nods.

“Can I sit next to you?” he asks.

Ranboo considers, and Tubbo lets them take their time.

Eventually, Ranboo nods, and Tubbo takes a seat by their side. Allium’s there, which gives Ranboo a bit of extra space. It’s probably a good thing right now.

“I’m really sorry for yelling,” Tubbo tells them, “I shouldn’t have done that.”

Ranboo just shrugs as he plays with Allium’s ear. The action makes Tubbo feel even guiltier.

“I was mad- am mad-” Tubbo admits, “but I’m not mad at you and it wasn’t okay for me to yell at you and take my anger out that way. Especially because I know that yelling is triggering for me.”

Ranboo whispers something, but Tubbo absolutely does not catch what he says. And it doesn’t help that Ranboo still isn’t facing him, making it impossible to even really attempt some lipreading.

And Tubbo is shit at lipreading. Like... so bad.

Ranboo shuffles a little, and turns to Tubbo.

“Okay,” he says, a bit clearer, enough that Tubbo hears the ‘k.’

Tubbo offers a small smile, hoping that it’ll be enough of a peace offering.

Ranboo gives one back, so Tubbo's pretty sure they’re okay.

“I’m sorry,” Ranboo says, “um- ‘bout the family stuff. It can be hard.”

Right. That.

Immediately, Tubbo wants to share. He wants to vent, to explain why this is bothering him so much. He wants to tell Ranboo how he’s feeling and tell him about Schlatt- whoever he is. He wants to ask Ranboo for his opinion, for his advice, and what they would do. Because Tubbo is pretty shit at this stuff.

He’s always been the one in the friend group that lacked family trauma. He doesn't like that he can no longer claim that position.

But first...

“Age check?” Tubbo asks, now that Ranboo’s responding.

Ranboo gives another shrug.

“Can’t tell if I’m just... dissociating, or a bit little.”

Tubbo nods.

“Anything I can do?”

Ranboo shrugs again. That’s three shrugs now.

“Let’s try some grounding first?” Tubbo suggests, “gum or something? And just keep petting Allium.”

“Yeah,” Ranboo agrees, “that’s- gum yeah.”

So Tubbo pulls Ranboo’s backpack from where it's laid next to the couch.

Ranboo doesn't move for it, so Tubbo takes the initiative.

"Can I open your backpack?" He checks first, and Tubbo nods.

With Ranboo’s permission Tubbo zips open the smaller front pocket and sticks his hand in it, rummaging around slowly to find the small package of gum Ranboo has started keeping in his back. The stupid thing has worked wonders.

Ranboo’s always struggled with grounding, finding something that works for him, and when his therapist had suggested gum it had been a life saver. For some reason- that was the thing that did it for him, that finally worked after trying and failing time and time and again to find a grounding method that actually had success.

So Tubbo opens the container, pulls out a piece and hands it over to Ranboo.

Ranboo takes it smoothly, popping it easily into his mouth and the action is so smooth Tubbo's sacred that he might swallow it.

But his jaw starts moving so Tubbo's assuming that has in fact not happened. Which is good. He'd prefer one of his best friends not choke and die on gum. That'd suck.

Tubbo watches, waits patiently, and observes how Ranboo comes back to him.

The changes are subtle, especially to an untrained eye, but Tubbo is used to how Ranboo's eyes turn from glass to focused and how tense muscles slowly relax. He knows how Ranboo's breathing changes to its usual odd stutter instead of short panting gasps or intentional long breaths.

Tubbo waits.

Ranboo continues to pet Allium, grounding himself in her fur and weight. God, she's been so good for Ranboo. It's really incredible to see.

"Think I am little," Ranboo eventually admits, "mm- eleven or so."

He then peers at Tubbo, a gaze mixed with both fear and defiance.

It's a gaze that tells Tubbo 'I'm terrified of you judging me for this so I'm preemptively putting up walls and barriers so it hurts less when I lose you.'

It's a gaze Ranboo too frequently holds.

So Tubbo thinks of his response before speaking.

"Okay," Tubbo agrees, "double digits, how's that feel?"

It's enough to make Ranboo blush lightly, ducking his head and giving the grin that regressed him is so famous for.

"Thanks," he says, "it's my- sometimes being older I feel like..." Ranboo shrugs.

"Age regression is a spectrum," Tubbo reminds, because they've all learned about this and discussed the reality, "eleven, and all older ages, are just as valid."

Ranboo nods. Tubbo can tell how he lightens and relaxes; it was the reassurance he needed.

"Why are you mad?" Ranboo eventually asks, "I know you're not mad at me... but..."

Tubbo hums, and considers.

"I'm mad at Tommy mostly," Tubbo admits, "because he was really rude when I was going through something that's hard. And I'm really mad at my parents for keeping ionformtation

from me and doing like- really fucked up things. I don't know all the details but how they talked about my mom..."

They talked about Tubbo's mom like she was less than human, as if she was a merchant for them to buy Tubbo off of, as if she was a trader that they could bargain with.

But she isn't. She's a human, an equal human, and they took him from her.

She- she hadn't wanted to give him up. That doesn't make her good- it doesn't make her a decent parent. But it is something.

It means Tubbo was loved- at least to some degree.

"You know how when you and Niki got separated?" Tubbo broaches.

Ranboo looks down, away. Tubbo wonders if maybe now wasn't the best time to bring this up.

"Yeah," they admit, "It sucked."

"Well I think- I think I got separated from my mom like that. I got separated from my mom in the same way that you got separated from Niki. You should have stayed with Niki. And maybe Niki wasn't totally prepared, but then the system should have supported her and helped her take care of you instead of just ripping you two apart with zero contact."

Ranboo lifts his head at the end, spears his eyes directly to meet Tubbo's own.

"You had a Niki?" they ask.

"Yeah" Tubbo agrees, "I had a Niki. But I never knew she existed, and I never got to go home with her."

It's a simplified explanation and maybe not completely true, because there's so many holes in this entire web of lies. Tubbo doesn't know what's true and what's not, but he does want to find out and hopefully his email to Schlatt will assist in that.

He needs more than what he has now, because right now he has nothing.

He has pieces of dandelion fluff, spare lint, but nothing substantial.

He's drawing conclusions without any writing utensils and at some point he's going to get things wrong enough there's no turning back. Or maybe he's getting things right.

Either way. He needs to know, but he needs more information to do that.

He was hoping to come home, to vent to his two best friends, and let their friendship relieve him, let their comfort wash over him and brush away his deep desire for more information as of now.

Unfortunately, that plan didn't go so well- considering Tommy stormed out.

But he has Ranboo, and Ranboo seems to get that this means a lot to Tubbo, so Tubbo vents and talks a little more- careful to still keep the conversation age appropriate- and then they put on a Disney nature documentary.

It's something they both enjoy filled with facts and information that had Tubbo stop worrying about his own lack of knowledge.

Unfortunately, the peace doesn't stay, because Tommy lives here as well. And Tommy comes home.

He brings Wilbur with him. Tommy storms past them both to his room, and Ranboo curls a little tighter on the couch. Allium pokes her head back up, carefully watching her handler. Tubbo sighs, more angry than anything and turns to Tommy's brother.

"Hi Wil."

Wilbur gives a nod.

"Can I sit?" he asks.

Oh, so Wilbur's sticking around then? If he's about to get upset with Tubbo and Ranboo about Tommy's pissy mood, Tubbo is sure going to have words with him.

"Yeah, 'course," Ranboo says. Tubbo spares a glance at him, and well- it's hard to tell sometimes, especially when Ranboo regresses to older ages- but Tubbo's pretty sure he's not regressed anymore.

Wilbur joins them, sitting in one of the armchairs next to the couch.

Tubbo prepared for a fight, and wondered when that started becoming his automatic reaction.

He's always been the chill one. Well not really- he's been a chaotic fucker since he was old enough to know the word 'chaos-' but Tubbo's also the one to assume the best of people.

He's not a challenger to individuals, not someone who will fight it out one on one.

He'll break systems, dismantle archaic ways of belief, but he doesn't go to people.

It's much more fun to watch the world burn than an individual.

Somehow, in this single few hour period, that's changed. He doesn't like how easily it has changed, how quickly. And he's not sure he can turn it back.

So he prepares for a fight with Wilbur.

"You two doing okay?" Wilbur asks.

"Yeah," Ranboo says after a moment, and actually seems to mean it.

Tubbo elects not to respond, instead giving the elder an odd look.

"Whatcha mean?" he asks.

"I heard that some shit went down," Wilbur admits, "I checked in with Tommy- he's gonna take some space but he's okay. But I want to make sure you guys are too. Kid's my brother but he knows how to hit where it hurts."

He does. He really does.

Tubbo knows that. Because Tommy has pushed him away before, has pushed him away hard. Tommy has gone after him, has hurt him, but some reasons how he acted today is so much different than anything Tubbo's ever faced before.

How does he tell Wilbur- 'No, no I'm not okay. You're brother really fucked me up.'

Wilbur looks at him.

"Let's talk," he offers.

Tubbo blinks, and a moment later, Ranboo excuses himself, Allium padding after him. Traitor.

Then it's just him and Wilbur.

"So," Wil says, "what dickhead thing did he do now?"

Tubbo snorts, fiddles with his hands, adjusts his hearing aids. Really he's just looking for ways to delay the inevitable.

"I just found out I was adopted as a kid," Tubbo says, "and that my parents have been lying to me about that my entire life." Tubbo shrugs, "and then Tommy comes in and says 'at least you were adopted as a baby,' as if that makes this shit any better."

"Ah," Wilbur says, "yeah that would do it."

"Yeah," Tubbo grumbles.

"You know Tommy goes on the offensive," Wilbur reminds, "He does these things to hurt people so it hurts less when people leave him."

Yeah, Tubbo knows. That doesn't make it any better, that doesn't make it hurt any less. He really doesn't need Wilbur excusing Tommy's action right now.

"But," Wilbur says, "That still doesn't make what Tommy said okay. I can imagine that it hurt a lot."

Tubbo thinks, shrugs.

"Yeah," he admits, "Hurt a lot. It's just- I dunno, I feel like this is a dream. Like one time I dreamed about being experimented on by Russian spies and all of these feels like more of a dream than that. Like this universe- this timeline where I find out I'm adopted at 20 years old

has to be a tiny grain of sand in the multiverse and I don't get why it's happening and why I'm here and why at this moment."

Tubbo looks at Wilbur, who has been graciously listening.

"I'm having a bit of an exponential crisis."

Wilbur laughs.

"I think you mean existential."

Tubbo frowns, because there's no way that's what the word actually is.

"No," he insists, "exponential, because it keeps just multiplying itself again and again. It's a big crisis. What the hell even is existential? That's like aliens, or something."

Wilbur snorts.

"Existential means considering existence- specifically the condition of being human."

Tubbo blinks because yeah that was a bunch of big words that really make zero sense.

"Definitely not that then," Tubbo says, "this has nothing to do with being human and everything with the problem getting bigger and bigger."

"Right," Wilbur says. Tubbo can tell by how he pauses a bit he's giving in to Tubbo in that agree to disagree sort of way, but really Tubbo could care less- or is it couldn't care less? so he lets it slide.

"Anyways," Wilbur says, "yeah, yeah that sounds like a lot. I- look, I can't begin to imagine what you're going through. But I do know that family stuff is- it's a lot. And it's okay to feel uncertain and upset and off kilter. That's normal."

Wilbur's the first person who's really validated what Tubbo's feeling and going through. He didn't realize how much he needed to hear those words.

But he really did need to hear those words, because at them Tubbo is instantly relaxing and walking down.

He gives a nod, and Wilbur smiles at him.

"I is- is it okay if I just, like, rant a bit?" Tubbo asks, "Get this off my chest?"

"For sure," Wilbur agrees, and that's all the permission Tubbo needs.

He begins, he talks about getting this email from his brother and about confronting his parents. He explains how they admitted that his adoption was shaky at best and his mom had wanted him back. He tells Wilbur how his older sibling didn't even know. He ends it all by explaining he wants to know more, find out more, so he emailed Schlatt back.

"Schlatt?" Wilbur says.

"Yeah," Tubbo says, "that's my brother's name."

"No I got that," Wilbur confirms, "it's just that..."

"Just what?" Tubbo asks with a frown.

"I- well I-"

Whatever Wilbur says next is lost to Tubbo as he turns away and half mumbles.

"I-" Tubbo says, "sorry can you, can you say that again? It's uh- when you mumble and stuff..."

"Of course," Wilbur agrees quickly, which makes it all less awkward. "I was saying that I have a friend named Schlatt. Just not a common name, so it surprised me."

Tubbo snorts, "well tell me now if your friend Schlatt ever talks about having a long lost brother because maybe you should hook us up."

Wilbur pauses.

"What?" Tubbo pushes.

"Well-" Wilbur hedges, "that's just- that's just the thing. Schlatt has talked about a younger brother that uh, that got taken away and adopted," he admits. "It's- it hasn't come up a lot but- I mean y'know, I've been through the system so we've- we've talked about that sort of stuff."

"You have to be shitting me," Tubbo says.

Because really, what are the odds there's two random Schlatts with long lost younger brothers who were adopted that live in the area.

"Is his mom alive?" Tubbo demands.

"Uh, yeah, I think so," Wilbur says, "I can- I mean I can a-"

"No," Tubbo demands, quickly, fiercely.

He's not sure why he responds so quickly. All he knows is that at the idea, at the concept something rages inside of Tubbo.

Maybe rage is the wrong word because he isn't mad, or angry. But it is powerful and firecr and burns everything in its path.

"No," Tubbo says, "I- I'd prefer- I don't- I mean I have his email anyway."

Wilbur gives a slow nod, but doesn't push the topic.

"Uh, yeah," Tubbo says, "do you- do you know anything else about his mom?"

Wilbur's face softens, relaxes. Something glows in his eyes, something Tubbo can't identify.

"Not really," he admits, "I know Schlatt and her are close. But I haven't met her or anything. Uh, I think she works in mental health? She's a psychiatrist or a therapist or something. And- and I think Schlatt said she used to be in the military or something."

Wow that is...

That is more information about his mother that Tubbo has ever had up to this moment.

"Oh," he says, because that about sums up everything he's feeling right now.

The two of them stand in silence for a moment.

"Hey uh," Tubbo says, "has he ever mentioned anything about- about a dad?"

Wilbur's eye glimmer fades.

"Uh- they're separated," he admits, "and Schlatt- Schlatt isn't fond."

It's vague. Very vague.

But honestly it's probably just what Tubbo needs. He wants to hear most of this from Schlatt anyways if he can.

"Okay," Tubbo breathes, "okay."

Maybe if he repeats it enough, it will be.

"Okay," he nods.

Wilbur is looking at him.

"Uh, thanks Wilbur," Tubbo says, "I- thanks."

"Of course," Wilbur says softly, and then shifts on his feet for a moment.

Tubbo's about to try and figure out how to end a conversation when Wilbur says one final thing.

"Hey Tubbo?" Wilbur asks, "You're- I mean I've known you for a while now and just... you're a pretty neat person, okay? And if you ever want to talk- I mean... look I know I'm Tommy's brother... but hey, I've known you for almost the same amount of time. It's- your space- you have a space with this family, regardless of Tommy, okay? If you ever need to talk... Or if you want some more distance, I'm sure Techno would absolutely love a call. It's just... I'm here for you, we're all here for you. Got it?"

Tubbo wonders where the tears came from and how long he can hold them back.

So far, he's barely hanging in there.

His throat is thick, like he has strep throat or has swallowed a gallon of honey. He's not sure how to get it to work.

"Yeah," he manages around the sludge, "yeah, sure, thanks."

It's certainly not elegant, but it's all he can manage and it'll get the job done.

Wilbur nods, slaps his knees with his hands and stands.

"I'm going to check on Tommy, and then on Ranboo and then head out," he says, "if you need anything- and I mean anything I'm a phone call away, okay?"

"Yeah," Tubbo manages again, and stares at the floor so he doesn't have to meet Wilbur's gaze.

The floor really is quite interesting if Tubbo looks hard enough he can make out tiny scratches all across the hardwood floor showing the passage of time.

Wilbur nods again, and walks off.

Well that's that, Tubbo guesses. What now?

What now turns out to be talking to Tommy.

Not immediately obviously.

They spend the night apart, sleeping on it, but by the time the early evening of the day after their fight happened, they're circling each other, waiting to talk.

So they do.

It's one of the biggest signs of progress Tommy has made, that when he lashes out he's able to return to the source and take accountability. So Tommy and Tubbo talk it out.

It goes well.

Tommy- well Tubbo gets how the entire topic and discussion could have been immensely triggering for him. That's no surprise to Tubbo.

What really surprises Tubbo is how responsive Tommy is to Tubbo's situation.

"That's- POGGERS- fucked up," Tommy agrees, "that your parents would- cut, cut, cut your dick off- do that and everything."

"Yeah," Tubbo agrees.

He still doesn't know what he's going to do about that.

"But you said you emailed Schlatt back?"

Tubbo nods.

"And Wilbur- STOP, STOP HIM- knows him?"

Tubbo nods again.

"Seems like it," he admits.

"That's fucking wild," Tommy says. "Well, I hope it goes- alright mate, hey it's alright- well. That's- POGGERS- that's- look I know I responded really shitty at first."

Tubbo nods.

"And like- not okay of me. But I- I'm here now. However this goes, I'm here for you, okay? You're my best friend. I'd do anything for you."

It's moments like these that Tubbo is glad he ran into Tommy all those years ago.

"Yeah," he agrees, "yeah, thanks Tommy."

"Of course," Tommy insists, "anything for my sidekick."

"I am not the sidekick-" Tubbo protests, and Tommy chuckles. That's the last straw and Tubbo goes diving for him. He's not really sure why he does it, but they end up wrestling a bit, falling onto the floor in a fit of laughter.

So yeah, Tommy and him will be okay.

Now does mean that Tubbo now has to deal with all the other shit that's going on with this.

Because there's two sides of the family coin Tubbo has to deal with- his biological family and his adoptive family.

His biological family is in play. Schlatt emails him back, responding with more info and generally being a stand up dude. He expresses interest in meeting Tubbo if Tubbo is up for it, and Tubbo- well he is. He responds with similar interest and they plan a day and time.

With his adoptive family, things get much more complex.

He's still not sure what he wants to do with his parents. He's frustrated and uneasy with them at best, furious and revolted at worst. He's not ready to confront him, not ready to open that can of worms.

But there is Eret.

Eret who was unaware of everything, just like Tubbo.

Eret who's five years older and was never told.

Eret who's always been there for Tubbo, even when Tubbo's been distant.

Eret who was the first person Tubbo came out to, because years earlier Tubbo was the first person they had come out to.

Eret who's Tubbo's sibling.

Except, are they really siblings?

Eret who's related to his parents by blood, who loves their parents.

And Tubbo who's the black sheep, adopted in, the outsider.

And Tubbo who thinks his parents are wrong.

Eret- well- Tubbo isn't sure Eret wouldn't take their parents side.

Tubbo hates that it's coming down to sides because their family isn't a fucking game of chess to win or lose. They're real, breathing people. Tubbo hates this, hates that he views in that way but how else can he view it?

How else can he view it except for the fact that his parents stole him from his mother and never told him. How can Tubbo see it as anything except them against him when they're the ones that made it that way?

It takes a lot of courage to call Eret.

Somehow, Tubbo finds it.

The phone rings and he's always off to a shitty start because even though Tubbo's sure all his phone settings are hooked up correctly with his hearing aids the audio still sounds off.

And not off in the way that the entire world sounds off, but off from the normal off Tubbo is used to. There's not much he can really do about it though, so he manages.

"Tubbo," Eret greets, and Tubbo loves hearing her voice, "What's up?"

That's always how it is with Eret. Tubbo loves his sibling, but he's also notoriously horrible at keeping in touch.

The last time he and Eret called was probably three months ago and their texts are sporadic at best. It's not that Tubbo doesn't care for him, it's just- well he's never been good at staying in touch.

Tubbo doesn't have to talk to Eret every day to know he loves him, and he doesn't need Eret to message him every day to know he loves Tubbo back. Not like Tommy who's constantly visiting back home and messaging Techno across the country all hours of the day.

Sometimes there's still guilt though- that Tubbo's a bad brother, that he doesn't talk to his sibling enough, that he should stay in touch more.

But when he finally reaches out, Eret responds the same each time, with no judgment, and is happy to hear from her little brother.

“Hi Eret,” Tubbo says. And fuck if Tubbo tells her everything he might lose her but... well it’s a risk he’s going to have to take. “I have some things to tell you.”

The explanation is the easy part.

Tubbo’s told it a few times now that the words flow off his tongue without need to focus or make sense of them. He can just talk and trust muscle memory will get him through this.

It's the response that's hard. It’s the waiting and desperate deciphering of clinky voices over the phone with Tubbo always missing words. It’s the response that might not be what he wants and it might hurt to the core. The response is where he could lose his sibling, lose all the good time and memories that come with them.

It’s hard waiting for that response.

Eret stays quiet.

Eventually, Tubbo has to say something- has to break the intense silence that sits between them across the phone line.

“Eret?” Tubbo asks.

“Oh,” Eret finally manages, “I-”

Tubbo waits.

Eret then says something, mutters something, but phones and service and shitty hearing and-

Tubbo grits his teeth. He hates phone calls with a passion.

“Can you say that again?” he asks, “I didn’t hear you.”

Eret repeats himself if the cadence and general flow is anything to go by, but it’s still not enough for Tubbo to catch, follow, and understand.

He hates this.

Phone calls are the worst.

But a text would be too impersonal and a video call isn’t much better considering Tubbo is shit at lip reading and doesn't know ASL.

So he strains over the line trying to understand his sibling and desperately hoping the words are ones he wants to hear.

“I-” Tubbo says, cutting himself off, “Sorry I- can you say that again?”

This time, he manages.

“I was saying-” he gets, and then a few lost words, “- can’t believe mom and dad would do that-” a loss or two, “-could do that to you, and not tell you. I-”

Eret goes silent, and then speaks again after a lengthy pause.

“Tubbo,” he says, “I am so, so sorry. That wasn’t okay of them.”

It's- Well it’s the words that he wanted to hear, but they don’t make him feel better.

“Yeah,” Tubbo says, “Thank you.”

Eret and him talk a bit more, Tubbo enlightening her on the full situation. She listens, and comforts, and pays more attention to Tubbo’s well-being than curiosity about their parents.

Tubbo doesn’t know what this means for Eret and their parents. But he’s pretty sure that Eret and him are at least.

That’s- well it’s enough, Tubbo supposes.

Enough.

Things have always been enough, Tubbo realizes. Not good, not bad, just enough. His life has been ‘good enough’ and his family ‘good enough.’

Tubbo had never done well in school but it had been ‘enough’ to pass. He didn’t go to college but scraped by with a lucky internship.

Tubbo’s never been spectacular or amazing... just enough.

Enough.

He’s always been in the background, the side character.

Tubbo thinks of what Tommy said earlier, about Tubbo being his sidekick.

It had been lighthearted joking, because Tubbo knows Tommy doesn't really see him like that, his friend just likes to be an egotistical prick.

It’s just- well, when’s Tubbo even been given the chance to be the center of attention, to be the main character?

When is the story ever about him?

And now, now it is. In the absolute worst way possible.

Tubbo’s standing center stage, in the limelight and he can’t help but look to his sides, look to the wings, look out in the audience and see nothing, to see emptiness, complete darkness.

Tubbo is standing center stage, finally the star of the show and he’s never felt more completely alone.

It’s an isolating feeling.

If he was the last man on Earth he doesn't think he'd last very long- even with all the odd survival tips and tricks he learned.

To survive alone, you have to be determined, mentally able, and passionate.

Tubbo- well he's not sure he has that.

Tubbo doesn't think he has that strength.

It's a scary thought.

So his phone call with Eret ends and Tubbo sits in these realizations and considers.

He feels alone, and trapped and he looks out at his closed bedroom door and he watches it.

He stares at his door, waiting for someone to come, for someone to save him. For someone to tell him he's not alone and-

And no one shows up.

He stares at his door for a long time.

No one shows up.

He's alone.

Sure Eret seems to care about him and support him and Tommy apologized and actually felt bad about what he said. Ranboo had sat with him and spent time with him and Wilbur had talked to him and offered support. Schlatt had reached out in the first place because he wanted to know more about Tubbo- reconnect with him after all those years but it didn't matter because Tubbo was still-

Oh.

Tubbo doesn't think alone people have that many people in their life.

It's then that Tubbo realizes he's not alone.

He's not alone, he's never been alone.

But that doesn't stop his pain.

Tubbo comes to another realization.

Tubbo feels alone.

That's an entirely different problem.

Tubbo looks up, sees the door to his room that still sits closed and remembers the moments before heading to his room. He had told Tommy and Ranboo that he'd be on a call with Eret, they had nodded and-

Well Tubbo had told them he was going to be on a call, no wonder they weren't going to bug him, bother him, Tubbo had told them he was busy.

And sure it would be nice for them to crack his door open but Tubbo was the one who closed it and he plays a part in this too.

Tubbo feels alone, but he's also the one isolating himself.

With shaky legs, he stands, and walks to his bedroom door.

His hand falls to the handle, and he twists it open, giving it a small pull in.

He stands in the doorway, facing the living room where Tommy and Ranboo are sitting on the couch. Tommy immediately looks up, and Ranboo follows the motion, giving a wide smile in Tubbo's direction. Allium looks up as well, head lifting and tail thumping at the sight of Tubbo.

"Tubbo," Tommy cheers, "How was the call?"

Oh.

Tubbo smiles and walks out to join them.

Feeling alone doesn't mean he is alone.

He can do his best to thrive in shitty circumstances.

And Schlatt- Schlatt has wanted to meet him. Him, just Tubbo. That was- that wasn't being alone. That was Tubbo feeling alone.

He certainly isn't alone because two days later he's meeting up with Schlatt at the park on the local community college campus. Schlatt went here- Tubbo knows. Wilbur had been the one to tell Tubbo they met here.

He doesn't know what Schlatt looks like so he's a bit worried he'll miss him sitting on a random bench like this but- well that man certainly looks like Tubbo.

The man says something as he walks over, and Tubbo waits until he gets closer.

"Tubbo?" The man asks.

"Hi Schlatt," Tubbo says in turn.

There's a moment where Tubbo's sitting and Schlatt's standing and they're both just looking at each other, studying, observing.

Schlatt looks like him. His nose shape is the same, and his eyebrows. He has the same singular dimple that Tubbo has when he smiles and their eyes are just a shade or two different.

If you saw them separately, maybe you wouldn't notice. But next to each other, they very obviously look to be brothers.

"Uh, do you want to sit?" Tubbo offers, and Schlatt stutters for a second, and nods.

He takes a seat on the bench.

"It's-" Schlatt breathes, "I-"

Tubbo knows he says something, catches the falling constants and breathy vowels, but it's not nearly enough to know what Schlatt says.

"I-" Tubbo says, "Um- Can-"

It's always so much harder with strangers.

People drilling him about his disability and getting way too personal or people assuming he can hear more than he can and acting like he's an inconvenience. It's an ableism roulette and Tubbo never knows what he's going to get, but it's always bad.

"I'm actually hard of hearing," Tubbo admits. And gosh, he hates to think it's something he's admitting, that it's something he's ashamed of because he knows, knows he doesn't need to be ashamed but- but well he still is anyways sometimes. A lot of the time.

"Oh," Schlatt says.

"Yeah," Tubbo says, "So if you can just- you don't have to yell, but speak clearly, face me, and don't mumble and stuff? And I might- I might ask if you can repeat yourself."

"Yeah," Schlatt says, he gives a small nod, "Yeah I can do that."

Tubbo breathes out.

"Can I-" Schlatt says, and then mumbles.

Tubbo grits his teeth.

Schlatt turns back to him.

"Oh shit, sorry," he says, "I definitely trailed off there. I was going to ask if I could ask you about being hard of hearing but then realized how incredibly insensitive that was and I trailed off to be less of an asshole but then I just didn't listen to one of the few things you asked me to do so I'm off to a really great start here if you couldn't tell."

Tubbo snorts.

It's hard not to because Schlatt's so sincerely putting his foot in his mouth.

The other grins sheepishly and- yeah, yeah this night be okay.

“It’s fine,” Tubbo allows, but he neglects to answer Schlatt’s trailed off question. Schlatt’s right- it was insensitive.

“So,” Schlatt says, “I guess- I guess you’re my little brother then.”

Ah. Yeah. And there’s that.

Tubbo nods.

“Wow,” Schlatt says, “That’s-” he shakes his head with a lush, “That’s kinda crazy. Like I knew about you and stuff because, pictures. But I- I mean I was little I don’t even- I didn’t remember you.”

“I don’t remember you either,” Tubbo says automatically, and then realizes how dumb that is. Of course Tubbo hasn’t remembered Schlatt, he was just a few months old.

“Yeah,” Schlatt says, like the remark isn’t dumb at all.

Okay, focus.

“I-” Tubbo says, “We’ve talked a bit, you answered some of my questions but like-”

“You want a timeline?” Schlatt guesses, “The whole story?”

Tubbo nods.

Yeah, yeah he does.

“Okay,” Schlatt says, “Sure.”

And he begins.

It starts with two people falling in love, as many love stories do. Schlatt talks about how they fucked around and found out. Schlatt ended up being what they found out from fucking around. Schlatt was a blessing and a curse as the idea of children was something they had loved and discussed and wanted. Except-

“Mom was in the military,” Schlatt says, “Navy, working on becoming a captain. I was- I wasn’t planned.”

But their mom had put everything aside, had Schlatt, took care of him. But she missed her job, missed the force.

Their dad had been the one to convince her to go back, promising that he had everything handled at home. Tearfully, she said goodbye and shipped out.

“She made captain,” Schlatt says, “It- when she tells me stories- she worked so hard to make captain. And then- then she got some leave.”

With a promotion and some time off, well there were many things to celebrate. Their mom got to see her partner- not husband, never married, and son once more. Celebrate, they did.

Their mom got pregnant again. Right after her promotion.

Which was- well it was poor timing for sure, but she had wanted him- wanted Tubbo. What a crazy, lovely thing to hear. Tubbo was wanted. So Tubbo joined them. But if their mom wanted to keep her position- well she didn't get much time home with Tubbo. A few months.

It was too early, too quick.

"It's one of mom's biggest regrets," Schlatt admits, "That she didn't stay longer. But the military- man they fuck with you. She- at first it was something she loved- she came from a military family- y'know? But the longer she stayed the more they took and didn't give back and she began to learn about all these systemic issues and the horror and terror the US military spreads and-" Schlatt shakes his head.

So their mom went back, doing her best to convince herself that this was her dream, that this was what she wanted and she missed her kids, but her partner encouraged her to pursue her dreams and that he had everything handled at home, that he was taking care of them.

"He did not, in fact, have everything handled," Schlatt says.

He wasn't abusive, and he never hit them. He cared for them, loved them but he also drank and got high and forgot to feed them and didn't realize how much care a newborn and toddler needed.

After a few weeks of Schlatt going to daycare hungry and dirty and talking about how 'daddy smokes and drinks at home,' child protective services got involved.

At first it was visits and welfare and warnings. It was expectations to keep the house clean and the kids fed and for drinking and drug use to not interfere with the care of their children.

There had been leniency, understanding, when their father explained that his partner was in the military.

But eventually, things fell through. Visit after visit and things were getting worse. And there was a tipping point.

"I- I overdosed," Schlatt admits, "I was- god, three, maybe? Dad had fucked up, I asked for something to drink- and well, he was high as fuck and let me have his drink. And it wasn't apple juice, I can tell you that."

Schlatt ended up in the hospital, getting his stomach pumped. That night Tubbo and he were temporarily removed from care. The next month was shaky, shifty, with their dad fighting for them back and not getting past visitation.

"And then he disappeared," Schlatt says with a shrug, "he missed a visit and they reached out to him... but nope, gone."

Services were scrambling, trying to get in contact with their mom, trying to contact their dad and getting nothing. Eventually Schlatt and Tubbo were split up and fostered out. That's when Tubbo first met his adoptive parents. Schlatt was placed in a home more equipped to support his health needs.

"There was a lot of concerns after I overdosed," Schlatt explains, "Because I was so young, so they put me in a home with foster parents who met checks to deal with disabled and medically complicated youth. They didn't have space for us both, and you didn't have the health needs I had, so we were split. It was supposed to be temporary."

Tubbo wonders if the checks Schlatt had mentioned were the checks that Phil passed.

"Eventually mom was reached," Schlatt says.

He never knew why it took so long. He suspected part of it had to do with his father hiding shit and part to do with the military not wanting to lose a solid captain. Part of it certainly had to do with the fact that their mom was in an active war zone and not easy to reach.

"Either way- I took months, but once the news got to her, she got straight home."

Immediately, she worked on getting both of them back. But military benefits were somewhat shit and she didn't have a job stateside and her partner had left her and taken their money. Their mom was home and there for them, but had nothing to support them.

Services told her that she needed to prove a stable, safe, supportive living environment before they could be returned.

"It took three years," Schlatt explains, "until I was finally living with her full time."

Months of visitation, of partial stay. Schlatt explains that he got to see Tubbo a few times and that their mom got to see him a bit more. But after Tubbo turned two, his adoptive parents challenged visitation, saying it was harder for Tubbo.

They insisted that Tubbo would be best without their mom, that the visits harmed more than they helped and Tubbo didn't recognize her anyways, that he had no connection to her and would be better off with them.

"Mom didn't want to give you up, but she was facing a lot of pressure. It- well your adoptive parents threatened to keep pushing further and further into family court and mom- well she didn't have the money for that. She would lose both of us again, and then it would take more and more time and- well she thought- they insisted that you didn't remember her, that you were terrified of her, that you hated seeing her--"

When Tubbo was three, his mom signed over all parental rights to him.

She hadn't wanted to, but saw it as the only option.

"And- that's kind of it," Schlatt was with a shrug- "That's, that's what happened."

Tubbo- Tubbo...

Tubbo feels-

Tubbo doesn't know what he's feeling.

His breathing is heavy, uneven, hard. Not quite gasping, but quieter, shallow and unsteady.

He feels like he's drowning.

Fuck.

Is Tubbo having an anxiety attack?

"Fuck, shit," Schlatt says, "Fuck, okay, hey, it's going to be okay, just deep breaths, oay?"

Tubbo glares at him.

"Wow, really fucking helpful," he heaves out around short breaths and paralyzing fear.

"Hey I'm doing my best," Schlatt snarks back, "Just, hey, okay look at me?"

Tubbo does, still gasping. Schlatt reaches out his hands.

Shak and confused, Tubbo hands his own over.

Then, Schlatt starts to sing.

"Hush little baby, don't say a word, Mama's gonna buy you a mockingbird. And if that mockingbird don't sing, Mama's gonna buy you a diamond ring."

Tubbo stares in disbelief.

"And if that diamond ring is brass, Mama's gonna buy you-"

"Are you singing a fucking lullaby?" Tubbo asks in astonishment.

"What?" Schlatt protests, "it worked didn't it?"

What- oh. Huh. Apparently it did. Tubbo's not struggling for breath anymore, even if he is still shaky and a bit lightheaded.

He looks at Schlatt for a moment, then takes his hands back. They're slightly clammy and sweaty.

"Still," he says, "a lullaby?"

Schlatt shrugs.

"Mom used to sing it to me when I was a little kid. And now, whenever I have a panic attack she'll hold my hands and sing it to me until I calm down."

"You get panic attacks?"

Schlatt nods, and then looks down and away.

He says something, something about him and- Tubbo doesn't get anything else.

"Can you face me?" Tubbo interrupts, and Schlatt turns back to him.

"Oops, yeah, sorry. It's just hard to talk about sometimes."

Tubbo nods.

"I um- well you know how I overdosed as a kid- well that- that wasn't the first time dad gave me alcohol uh- I've struggled with pretty severe addiction since I was about eight. I- the dependency was created so young and it permanently fucked me up. It's- I've been clean for three years now. But- well my childhood and teenage years were a bit of a shitshow. That overdose as a kid definitely wasn't my last and I've had plenty of panic and anxiety attacks through the years," Schlatt admits.

Tubbo blinks. Jesus.

"Our dad was a fucking piece of work, wasn't he," Tubbo notes.

"Yeah," Schlatt laughs, "You could say that."

Tubbo snorts.

"So," Tubbo starts, "Our mom- what's her name?"

"Oh, yeah, damn can't believe I didn't tell you, it's Puffy."

And... Tubbo's world is ending again.

"What did you just say?" he requests, blood pounding in his ears.

"Our mom's name is Puffy," Schlatt repeats.

Fuck.

I mean.. It's... the odds are crazy. But- well Tubbo doesn't know if they are more or less likely considering Schlatt lives nearby and has a mother and knows Wilbur. Does this increase these chances or make them even more unlikely?

Tubbo knows he's a statistical anomaly, but is his existence increasing in commonality or decreasing at this point?

"I- you got to be fucking joking."

"I mean, yeah it's an odd name but your name is literally Tubbo so I don't-"

"Is your mom a therapist?"

Schlatt blinks, "Uh, yeah?"

“Our mom was my best friends therapist in high school,” Tubbo realizes, “Like- I thought you knowing Wilbur was odd but holy shit I cannot believe-”

“What the fuck,” Schlatt says.

“Right?” Tubbo says.

God, how the hell is he going to tell Tommy about this.

Tommy who he just reconciled with.

Tommy- fuck.

This wasn't going to go over well.

Tubbo doesn't know how to broach it.

Turns out, it's not his choice.

"Jesus," Tommy says when he comes home, "come sit. Dude, you good?"

And Tubbo just blurts it out without meaning to.

"Your old therapist? Puffy? Yeah she's my mom."

Tommy blinks.

"Oh shit. That's weird as fuck. Well good news, I can definitely vouch for her, she is super dope."

Tubbo blinks back.

That's not the reaction he was expecting.

Where was the Tommy that would blow up at him? That would get mad and lash out at Tubbo? Where was the Tommy that would take this personally and make it about him because everything was always about Tommy and-

And that's not really fair was it.

Tommys eyebrows crease together and his leg bounces in a repetitive stim. He picks at his nails.

"You okay?" He asks Tubbo softly.

"You're not upset?" Tubbo asks.

"No? Why would I be upset?" Tommy asks with a frown.

Tubbo shrugs, and watches Tommy's leg bounce up and down in a steady rhythm. It speeds up, then slows, and speeds up again.

"I thought you'd be mad at me," Tubbo admits, "I dunno. It's just- sometimes with these sort of things you get upset and-"

"Fuck," Tommy says, "No. Fuck, Tubbo," Tommy whines and Tubbo doesn't know why Tommy's saying his name like that.

"Fuck," Tommy says again, then pauses.

"Okay," Tommy eventually says, "is it okay if I take a quick five minute break? I need some space so I can come back and support you, because you're hurting and I want to be there for you."

"Yeah," Tubbo says, "course."

Tommy nods, gives him a weak smile, and leaves the room.

Tubbo stares at the floor and counts the seconds in his head.

Tommy comes back in six minutes.

"Okay," Tommy says, "we need to talk. Because obviously- look I have my own fucked up shit to deal with. And- like I know we talked it out and stuff but it's obviously still affecting you and- fuck I am so sorry it impacts you that much Tobes."

Tubbo's not exactly following if he's being honest. Maybe he's just tired or maybe it's his shit ears and auditory processing. Or maybe Tommy's just bad at explaining things.

"What?" He asks, "Tommy, I have no clue what you're trying to say to me."

Tommy huffs and his legs pick up the same tempo as earlier.

"Okay," he eventually sighs, "Tubbo I don't give two shits that your mom was my old therapist. Or well- I do care because that's your mom and I care about you. But- but you shouldn't- you just learned who your mom was. You should- I want you to have space to proceed and consider what that means to you. I don't want your first response to be 'god how is Tommy going to react to this new thing this time'."

Tubbo thinks he's following, because well that's what had happened. Tubbo hadn't even considered what learning his mom's name meant for him because his thoughts immediately went to Tommy

"And I'm sorry that my behavior has forced your brain to like... default to thinking about me. I- sometimes I'd like to talk about that and what I can work on to make you feel more supported and less stressed in that area," Tommy admits.

"Maybe we can do a therapy session together," Tommy remarks, "with my current therapist, and not your mom."

That at least gets a snort out of Tubbo.

Tommy gives a shaky smile in return.

"Thanks," Tubbo says.

"Course man," Tommy says, "and hey- just so you know, you can be the center of attention sometime as well. Like, you can focus on yourself. That's not a bad thing."

Right.

That's... well that's something Tubbo's trying to figure out.

And now he's stuck in a whole new area of figuring shit out because he- well he actually has to start making decisions now.

He's gathered information, talked to Schlatt. He got as much backstory and exploration as he's going to get. He has everything he can to make choices.

Now he actually has to make them.

Choices like aht to do about his adoptive parents, if he wants to meet his mom, if he wants to have a relationship with his biological family, and what this means for him and Eret.

It's overwhelming honestly.

In the past, he'd go to his friends or his parents when he felt overwhelmed with making a decision.

But it doesn't seem right talking to Ranboo and Tommy about this- Tubbo's fairly certain it would be triggering to them and honestly, he kind of needs someone who's older's advice.

His parents are out of the question because he's not even sure if he's ready to talk to them anyways.

Tubbo doesn't know who to go to.

Maybe Wilbur... he had said all of the Watson family was there for him.

But we'll... even still that felt odd because he had known Wilbur as a teen and it...

Tubbo looks up to Wilbur, sure, but never saw him in a parental role, always saw him as Tommy's older brother. He doesn't seem like the right person to talk to.

Techno would be another option. He had a calmness that Wilbur didn't. Unfortunately, he also had the same age proximity as Wilbur.

Plus, Tubbo was really running low after the numerous phone calls and new people with new voices that he's had to juggle recently. His ears and brain are exhausted.

Techno was out.

Which leaves...

Well if anyone was a defacto dad, it sure was Phil.

It's weird texting him, because it's not like Tubbo's super close with Tommy's dad.

Yeah sure, Tubbo knows him and gets along with him and he's closer to Tommy's dad than any other parent of his friends but still.

Phil- being Phil- responds quickly and says he would happily talk to Tubbo.

They go out to lunch together because Tubbo really doesn't want anyone eavesdropping at his apartment or at Phil's house.

Maybe not the smartest choice considering the lunch hour is semi busy and the amount of background noise makes it hard to focus on Phil's voice.

But he's here now and there's no going back.

"I don't know what to do," Tubbo says, after outlining the situation, "and I was just- looking for some advice maybe? Like- my adoptive parents- they adopted me. They loved me. But that doesn't... that doesn't make what they did okay. But I know they loved me. And then my bio mom- like I don't know her yet but I think I want to? But I don't know if it makes sense or is even fair for me to want that."

Phil considers him, takes a sip of his tea, and watches.

It's a bit nerve-wracking, honestly.

"Tubbo," Phil says, "has Tommy ever explained to you the adoption status of each of my children?"

"What do you mean?" Tubbo asks, "yeah I know he's adopted."

"Tommy is," Phil agrees, "so is Techno. Wilbur isn't."

"Wait, wait, repeat that," Tubbo says.

Phil does.

Tubbo blinks, leaning back in his chair.

But- Phil- how could he not adopt Wilbur? Phil had always been so insistent for his love and care for his kids and Tubbo doesn't quite understand.

How could he deny Wilbur the same love as his siblings?

"What?" Tubbo asks, "I- why? Why would you do that?"

How cruel.

Tubbo's reality of who Phil is as a person is crashing down.

"He didn't want to be," Phil explains, "and that made perfect sense to me."

"But-" Tubbo says, because that makes even less sense.

Wilbur and Phil are as close as any father and son, probably closer than most. Their relationship is healthy and built on trust and it's so obvious if you spend more than five minutes with them.

But here Phil is claiming that Wilbur hadn't wanted the ultimate seal of love.

Tubbo doesn't understand.

"When you're adopted," Phil explains, "it severs all legal ties to biological family. You lose everything. Adopted children are given new birth certificates with adoptive parents' names listed. Adoptive parents can even choose to alter their children's names."

What.

"Those legal severes- well that's probably why you had no idea you were adopted. You're not legally tied to your biological family. Your birth certificate follows your adoptive families and any medical history is wiped away."

That... well that had been something Tubbo had been wondering, because how has he gotten this far into life not knowing he was adopted.

"It's- adopting actively hurts a lot of foster youth, especially foster youth that have remaining family. In Wilbur's case he decided that while he no longer had living relatives, he still wanted that legal connection.

"That made absolute sense to me. I would never deny my children's connections to their birth families- especially when those connections were healthy positive ones. Wilbur's family is fundamental to who he is as a person, and he's so am I, but there is no right reason for my care of Wilbur to trump his biological family.

"I became Wilbur's permanent guardian. It allowed Wilbur to keep legal ties to his family and gave him connections and resources to the welfare system that would have otherwise been cut off. Financially it's been a huge hell to us both."

Tubbo blinks.

"My point-" Phil continues, "is that Wilbur is my son. And colloquially we consider him adopted because 'permanent guardian' doesn't have the same ring to it and feels detached. Wilbur prefers claiming the word of adoption, but not the legal attachment. It was up to him.

"Either way he is my son, and I love him. This way just allowed him the most freedom and connection."

Phil looks at Tubbo.

"Do you know why I'm telling you this?"

Tubbo shakes his head, enthralled.

Phil takes a sip of his tea, leans back in his chair and lets out a soft sigh.

"I adopted Techno," Phil confesses, "at the time I didn't know the ramifications, how severe adoption was. Even if I did... Techno didn't have a lot of choices. It was be adopted by me or go to a home and family he would never be fully accepted and loved in.

"Techno chose me, chose adoption. At the time it seemed like a win but... but really it was the lesser of two evils.

"It had some positive points in the fact that Techno wouldn't be legally tied to terrorist action that was his parents doing, but it also means that Techno has no legal connection to his last remaining relatives. And yes- they might be terrorist and might have done bad things, but that doesn't mean it's right for a random stranger to rip away their child and lay claim to him.

"Techno chose me. I chose him. But both of us wish it hadn't been as deep, as intertwined and as messy as it was."

It's strange hearing Phil explain this, for him to describe regrets with adoption when the only thing Tubbo has ever heard has been love and praise around the idea.

"With Tommy," Phil continues, "we talked about permanent guardianship. I insisted on permanent guardianship. He insisted on adoption. And- God Tommy asking for a family, insisting on it... I said yes. I'm not sure I should have.

"I love him, of course, but sometimes I wonder if it had been a part of Tommy, a trauma part that had pushed it so much, that has convinced himself that he was only a valid member of this family if he had his entire legal history rewritten.

"Tommy's mom is dead but we really don't know about any other possible relatives and the legal changes made to his case in light of adoption make it almost impossible for those potential family members to reach out and connect.

"And maybe he wouldn't want to talk to them, but that should be his choice. That should be his choice like you had with Schlatt. And Schlatt- he had information about you. If Tommy has an extended family, they might not have that knowledge. Finding him would be near impossible.

"But Tommy should have that choice, that option.

"I love him, I care for him, and he will always be my son. But I don't know if I made the right choice with him. I don't know if adoption was the right choice to make.

"I wish I had waited longer," Phil admits, "given Tommy a year or two, then rediscussed it. I wish I had put my boys in more contact with adult adoptees.

"When they were younger and I had less experience I thought they needed normalcy y'know? And to be fair, they did. But I wish I had more actively given them options and access to the adoptive community. I'm not sure they would have taken it, but I could have done better."

It's weird to think of Phil not being perfect. It's weird to think of Phil as human.

In a weird way, it's relieving.

"Tubbo," Phil insists, "If you get anything from this, I want it to be this. Adoption is not a family building tool. It has never been a family building tool."

Phil finishes his tea with a final sip, letting Tubbo sit in his confession.

Tubbo- well the confession has been Phil's. It had been about Phil's life, about his kids and how he views their relationships. Ranboo was the outlier, not staying permanently and privately Tubbo wonders if Niki wasn't around how his story would have ended.

The confession is true and deep and...

And it's exactly what Tubbo needs.

Because Phil doesn't solve Tubbo's problems, doesn't give him answers but he does give him a new perspective.

He thinks of his parents and how they knew- they knew they'd be severing his connection to his biological family and he makes a decision.

They don't deserve him.

That doesn't mean Tubbo won't ever talk to them again, but he's definitely going to take some space and distance for a time being. There's going to be a break, and their relationship will change as well.

Because Tubbo deserved better. And he can't pretend everything is okay with the people who stripped him of his family.

As for his bio mom...

Well how soon can Tubbo plan to meet her?

Turns out a week from now ends up being the perfect time for them both.

A Tuesday afternoon, at a little local cafe. It's next to Puffy's practice, Tubbo notes, and it's weird to think he knew where his mom had worked for years but never knew him.

It's weird to think she has probably heard about him from Tommy and never knew it was him.

Tubbo arrives at the cafe, scabbing the people already around and catches sight of Puffy easily. He's never met her before, but both Tommy and Sch;att's descriptions were clear and the short woman with split dyed hair is almost certainly her.

Tubbo gathers his nerve and takes a few stumbling steps forward.

"Hi-" he greets, "Puffy?"

Puffy turns to face him, and instantly lights up. Her eyes glow and her hands pull up as her mouth drops open in shock, she stares at him for a solid few seconds before she breathes out his name.

Tubbo watches as her lips form the sounds of his name, unable to hear her whispered breath and suddenly everything collides.

"Hi Puffy," Tubbo says again, and gosh now she's just repeating her name.

"Tubbo, Toby," she says again- this time loud enough and clear enough for him to hear.

"Hi," he says breathlessly, and she gives a small aborted nod.

They continue to stare.

Tubbo has her eyes, he realizes, and her cheekbones. He's obviously gotten her height as well. He's taller than her, but not by that much and being taller than Puffy isn't saying a lot because Tubbo's still easily shorter than all of his friends.

She has a smattering of freckles- which is something Tubbo doesn't share- and her hair is curly than hers. Her eyes are a deep brown, his are closer to hazel, but they share the same head shape.

It's funny looking at Puffy, and looking at Schlatt, and then looking back at his adoptive parents and ever having believed they were related.

Because next to Puffy and Schlatt, Tubbo looks nothing like his adoptive parents. Nothing like them at all.

But when they were the only comparison- well Tubbo could make some jumps, some leaps, some ties with hair color and a similar lip shape and the fact that they were all white.

Those assumptions seem all so silly standing next to Puffy.

"Hi Tubbo," she says, "do you want to sit down, grab some food?"

"Uh, yeah" Tubbo says. "Yes please."

She nods, and leads him inside and Tubbo's left trailing after her.

Something in him surges, and considers all that there is to come from this meeting, and what it means.

Later, he'll make up his mind and call his parents. He'll state his boundaries, explaining that for at least the time being he needs space. They'll yell at him- angry, hurt, confused, and blaming Tubbo for their own past mistakes.

Tubbo will go to Ranboo and Tommy and the three of them will curl up on the couch and watch a movie together. Tommy won't be able to sit still, unable to focus on a full length film.

Ranboo will spout random facts about every animal that appears. Tubbo will love every moment of it.

He'll switch from emailing Schlatt to texting, and he'll text his mom as well after finally getting her phone number. Schlatt will come over for dinner and eventually Ranboo will meet his mom as Tommy has an awkward reunion. He'll begin to text Foolish more as well. Maybe not consistently, but it's a start.

Maybe one day Foolish will get to meet Schlatt and his mom.

He'll continue to spend time with his biological family, making up for lost years and forgotten memories. He won't be able to go back, but he can go forward, and this time he can do it with his biological family.

But for now, Tubbo scurries forward to walk next to Puffy side by side. A part of him he's never known decided that he's never letting his mother go again.

End Notes

And so it ends...

It's time. It's time for encompass to be finished.

I love this series to pieces, but it's at it's natural and and not a moment too soon. I don't share much of my life online but I am a uni student with a double major and have a part time job in addition to dealing with the daily lack of spoons that come with being disabled. I really don't have the time for this series anymore, as much as I do love it. Fortunately, I already had this planned ended since the very beginning, so it all flowed to a nice end.

I've gotten to see myself grow, and all of you grow. I'm so proud of us all.

I'll be around, replying to comments, posting other fics (sometimes even encompass shoot offs). But the main encompass series is over.

It's done.

take this compass, follow it home- the original fic to start this series off- hit 200k by the way.

I think that's pretty cool.

Thank you, and I'll see you around.

~the lightning system

~Cool Community Things to Check Out!~

[encompass: the sandbox](#): encompass: the sandbox is the official collection for the Encompass Sandbox Project- a project in which users are encouraged to take inspiration from the encompass series and create their own varying works of fiction from writing, to art, and so much more.

[encompass: behind the scenes](#): an insider look at everything that goes on in the encompass series. This series will feature Q&A, projects, plans, and other behind the scenes content.

[encompass: the extras](#): a plethora of other oneshots, outtakes, and aus that fit within the encompass universe.

Please [drop by the Archive and comment](#) to let the creator know if you enjoyed their work!